DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 404 CE 063 507

TITLE	Defining Basic Skills and Literacy in Four Federal Human Resource Programs. Report of the Interagency Work Group on Basic Skills.
INSTITUTION	Employment and Training Administration (DOL), Washington, D.C.; Family Support Administration (DHHS), Washington, DC. Office of Family Assistance.; Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Jan 90
NOTE	52p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Basic Skills; Competence; Educational Research; Federal Legislation; Federal Programs; Functional Literacy; *Labor Force Development; *Literacy; *Literacy Education; *Measurement Techniques; Student Evaluation; *Testing; Tests
IDENTIFIERS	Adult Education Act; Carl D Perkins Vocational Education Act 1984; Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program; Job Training Partnership Act 1982

ABSTRACT

Provisions and purposes of four federal human resource development programs were reviewed, and options regarding the definition of basic skills and literacy were analyzed. The four programs were as follows: Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Adult Education Act (AEA), and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act. Three fundamental questions were addressed: What skills should be included? What constitutes adequacy or deficiency in these skills? and How should these skills be measured? The concept of functional literacy had been redefined as the ability to apply skills to several major areas important to adult success. There currently appeared to be no systematic research to support any particular reference points for what constitutes deficiency or literacy or basic skills. Congress' use of a common level--at least to identify priority groups for services--would demonstrate federal policy consistency, permit a similar data point to be used in collecting participant information, and promote local service coordination. Because testing served a variety of purposes, the issue of measurement emerged as not what type of test should be used, but rather what tests were best for serving the various purposes. (An executive summary compiles recommendations. Appendixes include a glossary, description of legislative and regulatory provisions on basic skills and literacy in the four programs, program comparison chart, and 11 references.) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED356404

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Defining Basic Skills and Literacy in Four Federal Human Resource Programs

Report of the Interagency Work Group on Basic Skills

Workgroup Members

U. S. Department of Education/Office of Vocational and Adult Education:

Laura Johns (Vocational-Technical Education)
James T. Parker (Adult Education)

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services/Family Support Administration/Office of Family Assistance:

Barbara Binker (Division of Policy)

U. S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration/Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Development:

Steve Aaronson (Performance Standards Unit)
Gerri Fiala (Policy Unit)
Jerry Gross (Performance Standards Unit)
Libby Queen (Administrator's Office)
Sande Schifferes (Policy Unit)
Margaret Sharkey (Performance Standards Unit)

Consultant:

David Barbee (Center for Advanced Learning Systems, U.S. Department of Labor)

Jaunary 1990

CE063507

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

PREFACE.....

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....i

I. Introduction.....1

II. What Skills Should Be Included?.....2

III. Defining a "Basic" Level.....8

IV. How Should Skills Be Measured?.....15

V. Next Steps.....21

APPENDICES.....23

A. GLOSSARY: BASIC SKILLS/LITERACY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS.24

B. OVERVIEW: BASIC SKILLS IN FOUR FEDERAL PROGRAMS.....31
Adult Education Act 31
Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program..33
Job Training Partnership Act 35
Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act.....38

C. TABLE: FOUR FEDERAL PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE.....40

D. REFERENCES.....41

PREFACE

This paper is the product of an informal work group composed of staff from the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor who jointly reviewed the provisions and purposes of four Federal programs and analyzed options regarding the definition of basic skills and literacy. The goal of this effort was to clarify issues regarding the definition of these terms and to provide practical advice to policy makers in each agency. The paper represents work group members' best judgement as to the skills that should be encompassed under these terms, steps needed to define the level at which these skills may be considered "basic," and possible directions for how skill levels should be measured--within these four programs.

This narrow programmatic focus was deliberate, particularly in light of the ongoing Congressionally mandated study of literacy in the U.S. being conducted by the Educational Testing Service under a grant from the Department of Education. However, work group members hope this paper will be an additional spark to broader discussions on several fronts: 1) how literacy and basic skills might be defined in other Federal programs, 2) consistency in use of other terms in Federal programs, 3) the Federal role in promoting instruction and testing of basic skills in a functional context in schools, 4) the relationship between employers and schools in defining needed skills, and 5) how to define and teach the broader array of competencies--those needed for managing one's life, actively participating as a citizen, and being a fully productive worker in a complex information-oriented society.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Basic literacy level," "basic skills deficient," "literate functioning," "academically disadvantaged"--these phrases are but a few of the over 20 terms used in connection with literacy and basic skills in just four Federal human resource programs. Each of these four programs--the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the Adult Education Act (AEA), and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (Perkins)--is the subject of new or proposed legislation which converge around the role of basic skills and literacy in an employment context.

In addressing basic skills deficits in an employment context, these four programs face similar challenges in identifying priority groups for literacy services, assuring effective instruction, and encouraging coordination in service delivery. The definition of basic skills and literacy in the four programs has an impact on the way in which State and local agencies meet those challenges.

Defining "literacy" and "basic skills" requires that three questions be addressed: 1) what skills should be included? 2) what constitutes adequacy or deficiency in these skills? and 3) how should these skills be measured - by what instrument?

FINDINGS

I. What Skills Should Be Included?

Terms and definitions for literacy and basic skills have evolved over time and come to have many meanings. The evolution of these terms has reflected changed perceptions as to the fundamental nature of the problems which public programs are designed to address.

"Literacy" was once understood strictly as reading and writing abilities, regardless of context, with a clear cutoff between the literate and illiterate. The word has increasingly come to be viewed as a continuum of abilities in a set of skills used in a variety of functions in everyday life or on the job. These skills include proficiency in the use of numbers as well as words. A five-year long Federal research study on the functional competencies needed by adults in coping and surviving in society, the 1971-75 National Adult Performance Level (APL) study, redefined the concept of functional literacy or competence as the ability to apply skills to several major areas important to adult success. These skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening, computation, problem-solving and interpersonal relations.

While the word "literacy" has taken on new colorations, the term "basic skills" has had a variety of meanings. One of the key areas of confusion has been the use of the term to define all

the skills, attitudes, and behaviors which are "basic" to successful adaptation to a work environment. However, there are existing terms, such as "work maturity" in JTPA and "job readiness" in JOBS which focus on work-related attitudes and behaviors. (Such skills are also not directly relevant to programs that teach literacy skills in the context of daily living activities, the focus of many Adult Education programs.)

In providing literacy skills in an employment context, research suggests that in addition to the traditional three R's, literacy and basic skills should include speaking and listening as well as higher order thinking skills, all delivered in a functional context. Research also suggests that instruction should encourage the acquisition of learning techniques and strategies that can be used to assimilate knowledge in any field.

II. Defining a "Basic" Level

Levels of deficiency and adequacy are relevant only to the extent that they provide needed guidelines in program operation. Clearly, such levels can create requirements or send signals that affect client recruitment practices and a host of resource allocation decisions at the local level. In terms of the four programs, such levels could be used to delimit what clients should be screened in or out of instructional programs, define the goals of instructional services, or to signify a stopping point at which programs no longer should or must provide services. Such levels could serve two functions unique to the JTPA performance standards systems: as the point at which local programs could receive credit for enhancing literacy skills or as an additional factor for adjusting local standards.

However, for any of the purposes which a deficiency level serves, several questions emerge: what should be the reference points for setting such a level? is it necessary to define a uniform level or could such demarcations be flexible, based on State and local program discretion? and should such a level be common across programs?

There currently appears to be no systematic research to support any particular reference points for what constitutes deficiency in literacy or basic skills.

This paper acknowledges that Congressional intent, in targeting services to the more disadvantaged proposed JTPA amendments and in identifying priority groups for possible remedial education in JOBS, would seem to indicate that a uniform level must be defined to serve as a "baseline." A uniform baseline level is already implicit in Adult Education Act programs, at least for defining the nature of services to be provided. In Perkins, a uniform baseline level for defining basic skills deficiency could be of use to amplify the

characteristics of the "academically disadvantaged" or for clarifying the types of services or service priorities for which Federal funds could be used.

Using a common level across the four programs--at least to identify priority groups for services--would demonstrate Federal policy consistency, permit a similar data point to be used in collecting information about participants, and would likely promote local service coordination.

III. How Should Skills Be Measured?

A definition of basic skills and literacy that provides guidance as to what constitutes deficiency or adequacy must describe skill levels in terms of some unit of measurement.

At the heart of the debate over measurement are concerns about using the type of "norm-referenced" tests which utilize grade level equivalencies and school-oriented test batteries. The alternative to such grade-level oriented tests are 1) non-standardized "curriculum-based" tests and 2) standardized "criterion-referenced" tests that identify skill levels by numerical points along scales of difficulty and utilize test items drawn from a functional context.

Testing in all four programs can serve a variety of purposes, however. For auditable, program accountability functions, testing can serve 1) to certify whether individuals are members of target groups, 2) to document achievements of participants, service deliverers, or programs, 3) and for data reporting purposes. In providing services to participants, testing can be used 1) in initial screening for counseling clients, referral and further assessment, 2) for comprehensive diagnosis of skill deficiencies and tailoring instruction to the individual, 3) curriculum design, and 4) for monitoring progress to determine the effectiveness of instruction and to provide feedback to clients. The issue is not what single type of test should be used, but rather what tests are best for serving these various purposes.

Current regulation in all four programs as to the types of test instruments that can be used is permissive, allowing skills to be measured in terms of grade level equivalencies or in terms of similar scores on criterion-referenced tests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Skill categories for basic skills and literacy should be commonly defined in the four programs as: **reading, writing, calculating, speaking, listening, and problem-solving skills, used in a functional context.**

2) Although "learning" is not included as one of the skills, **instructional programs in literacy and basic skills should be designed to teach learning techniques and strategies.**

3) To embrace the sense of these skills as being generic and to avoid use of terms which have been overused or become ambiguous, **use of an alternative term is suggested.** **"Core basic skills"** is one such possibility.

4) **There should be a common, uniform baseline level to define deficiency in basic skills and literacy across the four programs.** Such a level need not delimit the goals of instructional programs or suggest that education and training services should cease once an individual has attained this "basic" level. Among programs where there are Federal reporting requirements, common points for data collection purposes are recommended, though these need not demarcate a single level.

5) **No recommendations as to where the "basic" level should be set are offered,** because of the lack of systematic research to support any particular reference point for what constitutes deficiency in core basic skills.

6) **No new <u>requirements</u> relating to the use of specific types of tests are proposed here.** However, given the prior recommendation that basic skills be provided in a functional context, **all four programs should eventually move toward use of tests that employ a functional context.**

7) **Federal regulatory, auditing and monitoring policies should acknowledge both the inherent imprecision of test instruments and the need to balance accountability and service design purposes.** Accountability concerns should not overshadow the need for testing geared to effective assessment and instruction.

8) Because the cost of administering tests in <u>all</u> the basic skills in our proposed definition could be high, **testing for certifying individuals as members of priority groups for services, initial screening and data collection should encompass functional applications of reading, writing, and math.**

9) **A survey of test administration practices should be conducted.** Based on the findings of such a survey, common Federal criteria could be established on test administration.

10) **Federal policy guidance and technical assistance** should be provided (possibly jointly by the three departments) to promote:

-- the provision of literacy instruction up to the point where entry into training, education or employment that utilize a higher level of literacy skills becomes possible,

-- the development of State and local policy and practices that promote coordination in testing and instruction, so as to make a continuum of services in literacy and occupational skills as widely available as possible,

-- assessment in all the skill areas in the proposed definition,

-- the recognition that testing is but one part of a larger assessment process and that tests must be properly introduced to clients so as not to alienate individuals who have previously experienced failure in test-taking situations, and

-- use of consistent and appropriate testing procedures, if found to be needed in the survey of such practices.

11) There should be **active or continued Federal support for research:**

-- to identify an objective basis for setting levels of deficiency, based on literacy requirements in the labor market and possible underlying thresholds in cognitive strategies or processes, and

-- on the accuracy and usefulness of various tests and the possibility of developing comparable scales of difficulty among different tests and their test items. Federal support for the development of new easily administered, inexpensive and reliable tests of core basic skills in a functional context should be considered.

Defining Basic Skills and Literacy

in Four Federal Human Resource Programs

I. Introduction

This paper explores common issues regarding the definition of basic skills and literacy in four Federal human resource development programs -- the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the Adult Education Act (AEA), and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (Perkins).

Among these four programs alone there are upwards of 20 different terms used for denoting skill areas, educational activities, service priorities and desired outcomes relating to basic skills and literacy. "Basic literacy level" in JOBS, "basic skills deficient" in JTPA, "literate functioning" and "educationally disadvantaged" in Adult Education, and "academically disadvantaged" in the Perkins Act are just a few of these terms--many of which are not clearly defined in legislation or regulation.

Each of these four programs, however, is the subject of new or proposed legislation which all converge around the role of basic skills and literacy in an employment context. Proposed amendments to the Adult Education Act emphasize the role of basic education in preparing individuals for the labor market. The new JOBS program and proposed legislation on JTPA emphasize identifying and remediating educational deficiencies, so as to enhance participants' prospects for economic self-sufficiency. The reauthorization of the Perkins Act is likely to strengthen the Federal role in promoting access to quality vocational-technical programs for the disadvantaged (which in the past has meant the use of some Perkins funds for remediation) as well as promoting the integration of academic and vocational skills.

These legislative changes reflect both a growing national concern with low levels of literacy among segments of the U.S. population and a perception that higher levels of literacy and occupational skills are required in an increasing number of jobs. Implicit is these new legislative provisions are two assumptions: 1) that enhancing the literacy skills of at-risk individuals will substantially improve their ability to succeed in the labor market, avoid welfare dependence and be effective in many aspects of daily living and 2) that directing resources toward literacy instruction (as opposed to other types of interventions) is a worthwhile public investment.

In addressing basic skills deficits in an employment context, these four programs face similar challenges in identifying priority groups for literacy or other services,

assuring effective instruction, and encouraging coordination in service delivery. The definition of basic skills and literacy in the four programs has an impact on the way in which State and local agencies meet those challenges.

To define basic skills and literacy in the four programs three fundamental questions must be addressed:

- What skills should be included?
- What constitutes adequacy or deficiency in these skills?
- How should these skills be measured - by what instrument?

II. What Skills Should be Included?

Terms and definitions relating to basic skills and literacy in the legislation and regulation for the programs being considered here fall into four overlapping categories. Some terms define or suggest skill categories, while others describe the characteristics of individuals in need of services, the types of services authorized under the legislation, or the outcomes or goals that should result from program interventions. (For a complete listing of these terms, see the Glossary in the Appendix.)

Our focus here is on terms delineating what skill categories should be included. Such terms can send powerful signals to State and local administrators and service deliverers as to the skills that should be assessed and taught in instructional programs.

A. Terms Identifying Skill Categories in the Four Programs

Major terms and definitions that identify or suggest categories of skills, in current and proposed legislation for the four programs, include:

- **"Adult basic education"** defined in Adult Education Act regulations to mean "instruction designed for an adult who -- (1) Has minimal competence in reading, writing, and computation; (2) Is not sufficiently competent to meet the educational requirements of adult life in the United States; or (3) Is not sufficiently competent to speak, read, or write the English language to allow employment commensurate with the adult's real ability."
- **"Basic and remedial education"** used but not defined in JOBS legislation or regulation.

- **"Basic education skills"** used in JTPA regulation on performance standards as one of the three categories of youth employment competency and defined as "reading comprehension, math computation, writing, speaking, listening, problem solving, reasoning, and the capacity to use these skills in the workplace."

- **"Basic literacy skills"** used but not defined in the current Adult Education Act and its regulations.

- **"Basic skills"** used in the Simon JTPA amendments[1] in connection with "basic skills deficient"--which is defined as reading and computing skills at or below the 8th grade level. The proposed Sawyer bill[2] amending both the Adult Education and JTPA defines the term as "reading, writing, speaking in the English language, mathematics, and problem solving."

  "Basic skills" is also used in the 1984 conference report on Perkins to mean mathematics, reading, writing, science and social studies. Although "basic skills" training and instruction are authorized activities under Title II of Perkins, they are not defined in regulation. The terms are used to mean both basic skills instruction for students enrolled in a vocational education program and basic occupational skill training.

- **"Literacy"** defined in the Simon literacy bill[3] as "the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate including the reading, writing, basic skills, computation, speaking and listening skills normally associated with the ability to function at a level greater than the 8th grade so that education, employment, citizenry and family life is enhanced."

Related to these are terms such as "work maturity" (in JTPA regulation) and "job readiness" (in JOBS legislation and regulation), both used to indicate a variety of attitudinal and

---

[1]At the time of this writing, the Simon amendments to JTPA (S.543) have passed the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee.

[2]The Sawyer bill (H.R. 3123) to amend the Adult Education Act and JTPA has been introduced to the House Education and Labor Committee, at the time of this writing.

[3]The Simon literacy bill (S. 1310) amending the Adult Education Act has passed the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee at the time of this writing.

behavioral attributes associated with adjusting to a work environment, such as punctuality, cooperativeness, responsibility, etc.

B. Terms and Definitions in Research

Terms and definitions for literacy and basic skills have evolved over time and have come to have many meanings. The evolution of these terms has reflected changed perceptions as to the fundamental nature of the problems which public programs are designed to address.

"Literacy" was once understood strictly as reading and writing abilities, regardless of context, with a clear cutoff between the literate and illiterate. The word has increasingly come to be viewed as a continuum of abilities in a set of skills used in a variety of functions in everyday life or on the job. These skills include proficiency in the use of numbers as well as words.

A five-year long Federal research study on the functional competencies needed by adults in coping and surviving in society, the 1971-75 National Adult Performance Level (APL) study, redefined the concept of functional literacy or competence as the ability to apply skills to several major areas important to adult success. These skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening, computation, problem-solving and interpersonal relations.

These three attributes of "literacy" -- its importance in an applied context, the existence of a continuum of abilities, and the inclusion of math-related abilities -- are encompassed in two concurrent, but separate, surveys of literacy funded by the Departments of Labor and Education and being conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton. Both current studies build on ETS' 1985 survey of literacy among young adults in which literacy was tested along three separate scales that defined specific contexts: prose, document, and quantitative literacy. Prose literacy focuses on using and understanding texts that include "editorials, news stories, poems, and the like," while document literacy relates to locating and using information contained in "job applications or payroll forms, bus schedule, maps, tables, indexes...." Quantitative literacy concerns applying arithmetic operations, "either alone or sequentially, that are embedded in printed materials, such as in balancing a checkbook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form, or determining the amount of interest from a loan

advertisement."[4] Test items in each of these areas were scaled for difficulty.

ETS' principal researcher for the current literacy surveys, Irwin Kirsch, notes that the scaling of test items for levels of difficulty was premised on the idea that there are a finite number of underlying skills and strategies for processing information in written form. At higher levels, according to Kirsch, these skills necessarily entail reasoning and problem-solving.[5]

Concern with the ability of individuals to utilize reading, writing and math skills in a functional context, particularly one related to the requirements of the emerging workplace, has implied to a number of researchers that rote or mechanical learning of these skills is inadequate. "Higher-order thinking" skills, such as problem-solving, reasoning and learning skills, are increasingly seen as necessary for success in the emerging workplace. Sue Berryman, in a Rockefeller Foundation report, Literacy and the Marketplace, observed that "improving basic skills is not a sufficient objective of the educational reform movement or for how we often conceive of literacy programs." She notes that many of the higher-order thinking skills have traditionally been a part of elite education, but that the challenge now is to make all members of the population competent thinkers.[6]

The need to relate reading, writing and math skills to a functional context has received additional support from research on the most effective instructional approaches. Such research suggests that adults and older youth learn basic reading, writing and math more easily when concrete examples relevant to students' lives are utilized. A draft report developed by the Department of Labor's Center for Advanced Learning Systems noted that studies in the military have repeatedly found that "where significant improvements in useful competence have been

---

[4]Kirsch, I. S. and Jungblut, A., Literacy: Profiles of America'sYoung Adults, (Report for the National Assessment of Education Progress, under contract from the U. S. Department of Education), Princeton, N.J.: Education and Testing Service, 1986, p. 4.

[5]Author's briefing to the work group.

[6]Berryman S. E., "The Economy, Literacy Requirements, and At-Risk Adults" in Literacy and The Marketplace: Improving the Literacy of Low-Income Single Mothers, (Papers from a Conference supported by the Rockefeller Foundation), New York: Rockefeller Foundation, June 1989, p. 28-29.

demonstrated...the instruction has not been academically oriented, but rather the contents, materials, and tasks have been developed to incorporate the functional concepts and practices of military life, training and job requirements...."[7]

While the word "literacy" has taken on new colorations, the term "basic skills" has had a variety of meanings. One of the key areas of confusion has been the use of the term to define all the skills, attitudes, and behaviors which are "basic" to successful adaptation to a work environment. For instance, a Department of Labor sponsored report by the American Society for Training and Development uses the term "workplace basics" to encompass a broad array of skills that were identified by employers as essential in the workplace. In addition to the three R's, these skills include knowing how to learn, listening and oral communication, creative thinking and problem-solving, self-esteem, goal-setting, personal and career development skills, interpersonal skills, being a team player and organizational effectiveness.

Clearly, many of these skills are also included as "work maturity" or "job readiness" in JTPA and JOBS. Indeed, the JTPA youth employment competencies system is built around distinctions between basic education, work maturity and occupational skill attainments.

C. The Need for a Common Term With a Common Definition

There are two potent rationales for a common term with a common definition. One is that a common term--which defines the competencies that should be the focus of assessment and instruction-- will enhance the ability of local programs to coordinate and collaborate in developing the most effective services. In an area where "turf" problems can be severe, opportunities for misunderstanding and confusion between administrators and service deliverers in different programs will be reduced by use of common terminology. Our second rationale is the need to emphasize a common Federal focus in these four programs on using these skills in a functional context, which for many participants will be preparing either for employment or for training programs leading to employment.

---

[7] A Description of the U.S. Experience in Providing Vocational Skills to Individuals with Low Literacy Skills, (Draft Paper), Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Learning Systems, U.S. Department of Labor, April 1, 1986, p. 30.

D. **Recommendations**

1) In light of the common focus on employment in the four programs, the importance of higher order thinking skills in many work and daily living situations, the need to foster coordination in service delivery, and the confusion engendered by using "basic skills" to define all the attitudes and behaviors needed to adjust successfully to a work environment, this paper recommends that basic skills and literacy be commonly defined in the four programs as: **reading, writing, calculating, speaking, listening, and problem-solving skills, used in a functional context.** For the sake of clarity and because some programs teach literacy skills in the context of daily living activities, this definition deliberately excludes the work-related attitudes and behaviors embodied in such existing terms as "work maturity," and "job readiness." For similar reasons, the definition also excludes the employment-oriented interpersonal and psychological skills suggested in the term "workplace basics."

"Learning" is not included as a skill in our proposed definition because it represents a set of techniques and strategies rather than a skill and because there are no valid tests for measuring it. However, such techniques are critical for assimilating new knowledge in any area. Therefore, we recommend that **instructional programs in literacy and basic skills should be designed to teach learning techniques and strategies** while enhancing the skills described in our recommended definition.

Problem-solving is included in our definition because it indicates the complexity of skills in a functional context geared primarily to the emerging workplace. It suggests to service providers that rote or mechanical learning is inadequate.

Speaking and listening skills are included because they are fundamental communications skills needed in a variety of contexts and are intimately related to language skills using written material.

2) Because the word "literacy" has come to have so many meanings to so many different actors, and because the term "basic skills" itself has several different meanings among these programs, an alternative term could be used to distinguish certain key features of the recommended definition.

Part of the difficulty presented in defining "basic skills" is that the adjective "basic" not only embodies the sense of such skills as being generic, fundamental or core, but also suggests a level of attainment (basic vs. intermediate or advanced) which could be applied to any type of skills. However, as will be seen later, defining what constitutes a basic level is problematic. To avoid this difficulty, to embrace the sense of these skills as

being generic, and to distinguish it from terms which have been overused or become ambiguous, we suggest use of an alternative term. **"Core basic skills"** is one such possibility.

III. Defining a "Basic" Level

One of the initial impetuses for this examination of differing terms was the possibility of dissimilar grade levels being defined for a "basic literacy level" in JOBS and for "basic skills deficient" in JTPA.

The desirability of a commonly defined level is but one of several issues related to setting a "basic" level of literacy skills. Other issues include: what reference points should be used for setting such a level and whether it is necessary to define a uniform level as opposed to allowing the demarcation to be flexible, based on local resource availability or State and local program discretion.

A. Levels and Their Uses in the Four Programs

JOBS regulations currently define a "basic literacy level" as one that allows an individual to function at a level equivalent to at least grade 8.9, thus permitting States to define a higher level. However, in JOBS regulation, the basic literacy level need be applied only to participants who are over age 20 and do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. Such participants can be exempted from educational services, if they demonstrate this basic literacy level or if their employment goal does not require preparation for a high school diploma or equivalent. There are no requirements in JOBS concerning literacy levels for participants who have, or are engaged in educational activities leading to, a high school diploma or equivalent. Nor is deficiency in basic skills a targeting criteria for JOBS services. ("Target populations" in JOBS are statutorily mandated groups identified as potential or current long term welfare recipients and therefore especially worthy of the attention of States' JOBS programs. Individuals in these target groups may or may not be deficient in core basic skills.)

JTPA identifies but does not define "basic skills deficient" as a target group characteristic. Attainment levels for "basic education skills"--one of three youth employment competency areas--are defined by local Private Industry Councils according to local labor market needs. The proposed Simon amendments to JTPA would define "basic skills deficient" as English reading and computing at the 8th grade level. In order to target JTPA services on the hard-to-serve, the Simon amendments would require that 100 percent of enrolled youth and 70 percent of enrolled adults in local programs fall into at least one of the several categories that identify characteristics of the hard-to-serve. One of these categories is "basic skills deficient."

The **Adult Education Act** defines deficiency in literacy skills in terms of individuals who are eligible for adult basic education, i.e., adults with minimal competence in reading, writing, and computation, insufficient competency to meet the educational requirements of adult life in the United States, or insufficient competency to speak, read, or write the English language to allow employment commensurate with the adult's real ability. AEA regulations identify "adult basic education" as including grades 0 through 8.9 (if grade level measures are used). Those eligible for adult secondary education are adults who are literate and can function in everyday life, but are not proficient, or do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. According to regulation, adult secondary education includes grades 9.0 through 12.9 when grade level measures are used (and generally refers to diploma programs or preparation for GED testing). A cap of 20 percent is placed on use of funds for adult secondary education. The Act identifies as a priority group for services "educationally disadvantaged" adults, defined as those who demonstrate basic skills at or below the 5th grade or are placed in the beginning level of programs that do not use grade level measures.

The **Perkins Act** does not have a comparable term defining a basic level for literacy skills. Rather, Perkins requires that the "disadvantaged" have equal access to vocational education and that a certain percentage of Federal funds be used to provide services to this and other special populations. Disadvantage can either be economic or academic. According to regulation for the Act, the "academically disadvantaged" are individuals who score at or below the 25th percentile on a standardized achievement or aptitude test, whose secondary school grades are below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, or who fail to attain minimal academic competencies. This allows for State and, primarily, local discretion in determining such minimal competencies.

B. Deficiency and Adequacy in the Context of Program Operation

Levels of deficiency and adequacy are relevant only to the extent that such discriminations provide needed guidelines in program operation. Clearly, such levels can create requirements or send signals that affect client recruitment practices and a host of resource allocation decisions at the local level. In terms of the four programs such levels could serve to:

- **Identify a target group**, i.e., "screen in" participants which a local program is held accountable for serving or encouraged to serve. For instance, in the Simon amendments to JTPA, "basic skills deficient" is one of six characteristics of hard to serve individuals that local programs must target for enrollment. Similarly, in Perkins, "academically disadvantaged" vocational

students must be provided services that will enable them to succeed in vocational-technical education programs.

- **Screen out or exempt clients from certain required or suggested services.** Currently in some JTPA programs clients are referred elsewhere when their core basic skill levels are so low that they would be unlikely to succeed in certain training programs.[8] Clients could also be screened out if their literacy skill levels were so high that basic skill instructional services were not needed. In JOBS, participants 20 years or older who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent can be exempted from educational services if they demonstrate a "basic literacy level" or their employment goal does not require preparation for a high school diploma or equivalent.

- **Define goals for service providers and participants.** Goals for skill attainments could be uniform among participants who received instruction in a certain educational package or program component. Goals could also be geared to the specific job or occupation for which an individual was being prepared. Setting such goals could be part of employability or individual plans which are required to be developed in JOBS and in proposed JTPA amendments, and are encouraged in Adult Education. In JTPA practice, goals could be specified in contracts with service providers, in which payment might be contingent on participants meeting such levels.

- **Signify a stopping point** at which programs no longer must or should provide services to enhance core basic skills. This is a possible resource allocation strategy in programs with scarce funds that are required to serve those most in need, particularly if policy is driven by the principle of providing the least expensive services to the greatest number of participants. For example, local program managers could decide that no further instructional services would be provided once participants reached certain tested literacy skill levels.

In addition to these four functions, a "basic" level could

---

[8]Bailis, L. N. and Butler, E. P., Testing and Assessment in Publicly-Supported Job Training for the Disadvantaged, (Prepared for The National Commission on Testing and Public Policy), Center for Human Resources, Brandeis University, July 1989, p. 16-17.

also potentially serve two functions unique to JTPA's performance management system--as the point at which local programs could receive credit for enhancing literacy skills or as an additional factor for adjusting local standards. In JTPA, local programs are held accountable for meeting standards for aggregate employment and instructional outcomes, such as the percentage of terminees who are placed in employment or (youth) attainment of skill competencies or a major level of education. These standards can be adjusted through use of a statistical model that takes into account a variety of client and local labor market characteristics. A level defining basic skills deficiency could serve as an adjustment factor, with local standards being increased or decreased according to the percentage of clients served in the SDA who fell above or below this level.

B. Reference Points for Defining a "Basic" Level

Currently, there appear to be two general approaches to defining levels of deficiency and adequacy.

One approach would peg such levels to the actual demands of the workplace and everyday life, particularly in programs that offer basic skill instruction in order to enhance participants' ability to obtain a job and perform successfully in it, pursue further training, or function more effectively in a variety of non-work daily living situations.

However, research on the levels of core basic skills needed for the actual tasks in a variety of jobs and occupations appears to be in a formative stage. In military training programs, there have been attempts to identify the basic skills required in various jobs; similarly, many employers have recently begun to define such competencies. Competency-based instructional and evaluation systems that identify technical job skills needed in a variety of occupations and skill clusters have been developed in vocational-technical education, apprenticeship and Job Corps programs. These occupational competencies often embrace many of the core basic skills discussed here.

Similarly, there is little research on how actual skill requirements could be categorized. Deficiency and adequacy could be set according to basic skill levels utilized in specific jobs, technical skill clusters, or strata of occupations that offer a certain level of income. They could also be linked to skill levels required in everyday life tasks. Levels could be set so that considerable "overlearning" relative to specific occupations or tasks takes place, thus permitting greater flexibility in obtaining other jobs in the future or in performing a variety of daily living tasks.

Another approach to defining adequacy and deficiency would peg them to underlying cognitive skills and strategies, if not

mental processes which are unrelated to specific contexts. Some research, at least that relating to children and youth, suggests there are thresholds in these cognitive processes. A report developed by researchers at Brandeis University on basic skills, as part of a grant from the Department of Labor, notes that:

> In general, the fourth grade reading level marks the transition from the process of "learning to read" to one of "reading to learn." Below the fourth grade level, students lack the basic decoding skills needs to read printed materials; above that point they are able to work more independently and can read well enough to locate information, combine ideas and make inferences from relatively simple materials. A similar shift occurs around the 8th grade level, as students are able to deal with longer and more difficult materials.[9]

While there may be such thresholds for children, no evidence confirms or disconfirms whether such thresholds exist for adults. Without such thresholds, any cutoffs for the purposes of defining deficiency, adequacy or proficiency would be arbitrary, at least in terms of this area of research.

In point of fact however, training and education programs for adults have used reading grade level equivalents pegged to the supposed competency levels required in a variety of materials. Because beginning preparation for the GED has been correlated with at least an 8th grade reading level, this has often been the level defined as "basic" in some programs. Since some training programs use printed material identified as having reading levels of grade 9.0 or even 12.0, such levels have often been required for program entry. However, these materials, as well as the skills assessed in the grade level equivalent tests required for program entry, may be far removed from the actual skills needed in the jobs for which the training is geared.

C. Fixed vs. Flexible Levels

Available research does not yet provide a definitive, objective basis for setting fixed levels for deficiency and adequacy in the core basic skills. In the absence of such an objective basis, the definition of deficiency or adequacy could be made flexible, based on State and local decisions on resource availability, determinations of the most in need, or on entry

---

[9] An Introduction to Basic Skills Education for At-Risk Youth: A Decision Maker's Guide to Principles and Practices, (Paper prepared under a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor), Waltham, Mass.: Center for Human Resources, Heller School, Brandeis University, December 1989, p. 12.

level standards in local labor markets. In JTPA, for instance, Private Industry Councils determine levels of need and achievement for "youth employment competencies" in basic education as well as occupational and pre-employment/work maturity skills. The Perkins Act permits a similar discretion, around broad Federal parameters, in identifying potential candidates for remediation or special services in vocational-technical education.

Permitting local or State discretion in defining a "basic" level might create some unintended effects, particularly in a permissive Federal regulatory and monitoring environment and when the basic level was a critical factor in program enrollment or service priority decisions. For instance, if local discretion were permitted, a nondirective approach runs the risk of allowing local programs to set levels in ways that might obviate legislatively defined priorities. For example, past experience with the performance-oriented environment in JTPA suggests that such discretion at the local level might enable levels to be set high and therefore result in the practice of "creaming," i.e., enrolling those participants who have the highest skill levels and are most likely to succeed.

Congressional intent to target services to the more disadvantaged in JTPA amendments suggests that a uniform level must be defined to serve as a "baseline"--at least for targeting purposes in this program. In JTPA, the requirements of developing an adjustment factor in setting local performance standards support arguments for a uniform baseline level. The role of the basic literacy level in JOBS in identifying participants for possible remediation also suggests that a uniform baseline level is needed. In the Adult Education Act, uniform levels already seem to be implicit in the descriptions of the types of services upon which funds should be expended. In Perkins, a uniform baseline level for defining basic skills deficiency could be of use to amplify the characteristics of the "academically disadvantaged" or for clarifying the types of services or service priorities for which Federal funds could be used.

D. Is a Common Level Needed Across Programs?

Using a common level[10] across the four programs would demonstrate Federal policy consistency, permit a similar data point to be used in collecting information about participants and likely promote local coordination, if not interchangeable and compatible literacy services.

---

[10]"A common level" is used here to indicate commonality across programs in tested levels in at least some of the core basic skills.

Different "basic" levels across programs clearly could affect the ability, willingness and desire of local administrators to coordinate service delivery. Different levels could promote the duplication of instructional and assessment services, impede cross-referral of clients, or increase the chances that referred clients would have to undergo multiple and unnecessary testing. A related issue concerns differential treatment among programs of clients with similar core basic skill levels. Dissimilar "basic" literacy levels for screening, referral or instructional goals could lead to the provision of very different services, in which the nature of the intervention would be dependent on what "door" a client initially walked through.

The impact of dissimilar levels on coordination relates to the purposes these levels serve, as well as to the auditing and accountability environment surrounding a local program. When auditing and accountability practices do not allow flexibility, the existence of different levels will likely create barriers to coordination. For instance, in a restrictive audit environment, different deficiency levels for "screening in" targeted clients could make it cumbersome to mount jointly funded remediation projects, with clients enrolled from separate programs.

The existence of different levels among programs need not be a product of mandatory levels being set by State or Federal government. Local agencies in each of the four programs could eventually be granted considerable discretion in setting these levels. In such a scenario, local offices could opt to use levels dissimilar to those in other local programs and thus create barriers to coordination. If Federal legislation permits such discretion, a way to avert coordination problems is to encourage local programs to cooperate with one another in defining such levels, as well as in coordinating the delivery of instructional and assessment services in the basic skills.

E. Recommendations

1) This paper acknowledges that Congressional intent in targeting services to the more disadvantaged in proposed JTPA amendments and in identifying groups for possible educational services in JOBS would seem to indicate that **a uniform level must be defined to serve as a "baseline"**--at least for these purposes in these two programs. Similarly, a uniform baseline level is currently used for describing adult basic education in Adult Education Act regulation and could be of use in amplifying or clarifying priority groups or services in the Perkins Act.

Such a level need not delimit the goals of instructional programs or suggest that education and training services should

cease once an individual has attained this "basic" level.[11] For this reason, it is recommended that common or continued policy guidance promote the provision of literacy instruction up to the point where entry into training, education or employment that utilize a higher level of literacy skills becomes possible. Common policy guidance should also emphasize the need for local programs to coordinate in the delivery of services, so as to make a continuum of instructional services in literacy and occupational skills as widely available as possible.

2) There currently appears to be no systematic research to support any particular reference point for what constitutes deficiency in core basic skills. For this reason, **no recommendations as to where the "basic" level should be set are offered here.** Active Federal support for research to identify an objective basis for setting levels of deficiency, based on literacy requirements in the labor market and possible underlying thresholds in cognitive strategies or processes, is recommended, however. Levels set for deficiency in Federal law and regulation should eventually be re-examined when research offers a more definitive basis for setting such levels.

3) **A common level, that serves as a "baseline" for the purposes described above is recommended**, both to demonstrate Federal level consistency in policy and to encourage coordination. Among programs where there are Federal reporting requirements, common points for data collection purposes are recommended, though these need not demarcate a single level.

IV. How Should Skills Be Measured?

If the definition of basic skills and literacy specifies deficiency or adequacy levels, it must also describe the unit of measurement used for identifying such levels. This implies that uniform, valid and reliable methods of assessment--standardized tests--must be used.

A. The Testing Debate

At the heart of the debate over measurement are concerns about using the type of "norm-referenced" tests which utilize grade level equivalencies and school-oriented test batteries.[12] A number of observers believe such tests are irrelevant or stigmatizing to adult learners and do not test skills in a functional context. They also are often limited to only two of

---

[11]This has already been suggested in the Preamble to the JOBS regulations.

[12]Tests can be normed around populations or age groups, as well as by grade level.

the six basic skills: reading and math.

Grade level equivalencies currently have the advantage of being a rough but apparently widely understood indicator of achievement. They are also the most commonly used standardized tests in AEA programs, with the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) apparently being the most common. Tests used in JTPA programs also have tended to be of the standardized, norm-referenced variety, with the TABE being the most frequently used.[13]

The alternative to norm-referenced tests are either "curriculum-based tests" or "criterion-referenced" tests. The latter, which are also standardized[14], identify skill levels by numerical points along scales of difficulty and use test items based on functional contexts. Ranges of scores can be "cross-walked" to roughly equivalent grade levels on norm-referenced tests. Some criterion-referenced tests are used to generate alternative credentials that actually describe the skills an individual can perform. However, the raw scores provided in other criterion-referenced tests do not as yet offer rough, commonly understood scales of performance.

Some criterion-referenced tests are actually part of integrated assessment and instructional packages which teach literacy skills in the context of situation-specific competencies. Part of the debate as to what tests and measurement units are most appropriate is therefore sometimes equated with what kind of instruction should be promoted in local programs. Some observers strongly support the use of competency-based assessment and instructional systems[15] and there are several States which have adopted such systems for basic skills instruction in adult education, JTPA and JOBS. However, other

---

[13]Bailis and Butler, p. 35.

[14]Both "norm-referenced" and "criterion-referenced" tests can be standardized. Adult Education Act regulations (Appendix A) state that "a test is standardized if it is based on a systematic sampling of behavior, has data on reliability and validity, is administered and scored according to specific instructions, and is widely used. A standardized test may be norm-referenced or criterion-based."

[15]Morris, R., Strumpf, L. and Curnan, S. and Rothstein, F. R., Editor, Using Basic Skills Testing to Improve the Effectiveness of Remediation in Employment and Training Programs for Youth, Washington, D.C.: National Commission for Employment Policy, May 1988, p. 46-47.

researchers[16] note that it is not yet clear whether individuals who acquire literacy skills in the functional areas taught in these instructional systems can utilize such skills in other contexts.

Other criterion-referenced tests examine performance in multiple contexts and examples, in an attempt to test underlying abilities. Test items in the 1985 ETS survey of literacy skills among young adults used this approach; similar test items are being used in ETS'survey for the Department of Labor.

B. Test Requirements and Practice in the Four Programs

Current regulation regarding test selection in all four programs is permissive, allowing skills to be identified by grade level equivalents or by scores on criterion-referenced tests.

The **Adult Education Act** now requires that standardized test results be used for program evaluation purposes. Many AEA programs develop their own curriculum-based tests, which are not standardized.

JTPA[17] regulation requires the use of assessment techniques

---

[16]Alamprese, J. A., Adult Literacy Research and Development: An Agenda for Action, (Background Paper for Project on Adult Literacy), Washington, D.C.: Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, December 1988, p. 22-23.

[17]The Simon JTPA amendments have a number of implications for testing and measurement of basic skills. The bill would require use of standardized tests for determining if individuals fit into the target category of "basic skills deficient"--defined as reading and computing below the 8th grade level or equivalent measure on a criterion-referenced tests. In terms of services, the bill also requires that enrollees be assessed as to their basic skill levels, but creates no testing or test selection requirements as to how this assessment should be conducted.

The bill would also require that measures of increased educational (and occupational) skills be part of the performance standards system, which implies that local programs would receive "credit" for increasing such skills. Because the performance standards system is based on a statistical model that ideally permits valid comparisons among SDAs and provides a mechanism for adjustments to local standards on the basis of client characteristics and economic conditions, minimun requirements for measuring and documenting skill increases would have to be uniform and consistent nationally.

that are "objective, unbiased, and conform to widely accepted measurement criteria"--but only for the three youth employment competencies, of which "basic education skills" is one. Formal testing is not currently required for assessing whether participants read below the 7th grade level--one of JTPA's required data reporting elements.

JOBS requires an initial assessment of participant's employability, but does not require that literacy skills be tested as part of such an assessment. Regulation does not preclude the use of either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests. (Participant performance at grade 8.9, or a higher level established in the State JOBS plan, can be used as one method to exempt participants who are age 20 or older from educational activities. Equivalent scores on criterion-referenced tests may be used in determining the literacy level.)

The current Perkins Act does not require that particular test or assessment instruments be used. However, the use of competency-based curricula and performance-based tests for occupational skills is widespread in practice.

C. Role of Testing Programmatically

Testing and assessment of core basic skill levels can have several different but critical functions in the four programs. For auditable, program accountability functions, testing can be used for: 1) certifying whether individuals are members of priority groups for services, 2) documenting achievement, both for individual participants and for evaluating a program's or service deliverer's performance, and 3) data reporting purposes. (In JTPA's performance standards system, such data could be used for developing adjustments to local standards based on client characteristics and for setting national standards related to basic skills enhancement.)

In providing services to participants, testing can be used for: 1) initial screening for referral, further assessment and counseling clients as to their needs and options, 2) comprehensive diagnosis of areas and types of basic skill deficiencies in order to tailor instruction to the needs of the individuals, 3) curriculum design, and 4) monitoring progress of individuals in acquiring increased skills, as part of an ongoing assessment of program effectiveness or to provide feedback to the learner.

The issue therefore is not what single kind of test should be used for measuring basic skills, but what tests best suit each of these purposes.

The list of purposes above suggests there are two broad and possibly competing roles for basic skills testing: program

accountability vs. serving client needs. The drive for accountability means that tests must serve the auditable functions of certifying whether clients fall into priority groups and whether, and to what extent, learning gains have been achieved. Given the costs and staffing requirements of testing, there may be a fundamental tension between the use of tests for compliance and program evaluation purposes, as opposed to the use of tests as part of a broad client assessment strategy for referral, diagnosis, instructional design, and monitoring progress.

Tests are only valid for specific purposes. Thus, the use of any type of test for screening or targeting poses a number of questions as to their validity for such purposes. The danger is that individuals will be inappropriately screened in or out of program services because of testing error--a possibility with any test. The chance of such error can be reduced by increasing the number of test items--and other assessment data. However, the time and costs in administering tests rises as the number of test items increase. Stringent test administration protocols for screening, that require longer tests, could, therefore, raise program costs even before a participant was provided any services.

D. Test Administration and Impact on Clients

Tests, as noted earlier, are only valid for specific purposes. However, the validity of tests also rests on their proper and uniform administration. Tests which are mis-used or overused, as noted in a Brandeis report[18], can be counterproductive. Improper test administration not only undermines the value of accountability systems, it also represents a disservice to clients. Information about test administration procedures, while primarily anecdotal[19], suggests there may be wide inconsistencies in quality of testing procedures, at least in AEA programs and JTPA.

A related issue is the mis-use of tests by adjusting tests and the testing process in order to derive learning gains for program evaluation purposes. Student familiarity and ease with the test-taking process can significantly alter tested performance, and a clever or unknowledgeable program operator may administer tests in such a way as to show learning gains when none have actually taken place.

---

[18]Bailis and Butler, p. 36.

[19]Ibid, p. 36 and Testing and Assessment in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language Programs, (Draft Report), Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1989.

It should be noted that tests of core basic skills, when used for assessment, are only one source of information about a client's skills and needs and for determining employment and educational goals. As conferees at a Brandeis workshop on basic skills assessment concluded, formal tests may be necessary but they alone are not sufficient to assess client skills and needs.[20]

The testing process itself can also be a disincentive for some clients. For instance, one report notes that in JTPA "there is widespread testimony to support the belief that the mere existence of objective tests at program intake screens out people who are unwilling to go through the testing process," apparently because of "apprehensions that come from a lifetime of doing poorly on standardized tests."[21]

E. Coordination Concerns

For almost all of the purposes to which tests can be put, the use of different tests, as well as different assessment procedures, would have the potential to create significant barriers to coordination, particularly in a restrictive regulatory and auditing environment.

Use of different tests might foster separate and duplicative tests at each intake point and could discourage programs from making or accepting referrals. Different tests for measuring program achievement might also make program operators hesitant to utilize services of another agency, or preclude the collaborative jointly funded projects. Unnecessary duplication in testing services themselves might also result.

F. Recommendations

1) **No new requirements relating to the use of specific types of tests are proposed here.** However, given our prior recommendation that basic skills be provided in a functional context, we recommend that **all four programs should eventually move toward use of tests that employ a functional context.** Policy guidance promoting such tests is recommended as is **continued Federal research on the accuracy and usefulness of various tests and the possibility of developing comparable scales of difficulty** among different tests and their test items. Federal support for the development of new easily administered, inexpensive and reliable tests of core basic skills in a functional context should be considered.

---

[20]Bailis and Butler, p. 40-41.

[21]Ibid, p. 19-20.

2) **Strongly recommended are Federal regulatory, auditing and monitoring policies which acknowledge both the inherent imprecision of test instruments and the need to balance accountability and service design purposes.** Accountability concerns should not overshadow the need for testing geared to effective assessment and instruction.

3) Because of the high cost to clients and the damage to program accountability through test misuse, **a survey of test administration practices is recommended.** Based on the findings of such a survey, common Federal criteria could be established on test administration, supported by administrative guidance and increased technical assistance, possibly provided jointly by the three Federal departments. Such guidance and technical assistance could address the need to properly introduce tests to clients so as not to alienate individuals who have previously experienced failure in test-taking situations.

4) Because the cost of administering tests in <u>all</u> the basic skills in our proposed definition could be high, we suggest that **testing for certifying individuals as members of priority groups for services, initial screening and data collection encompass functional applications of reading, writing, and math.**[22] Policy guidance and technical assistance should promote assessment in all the skill areas in our proposed definition, as well as instructional methods and techniques that improve skills where deficiencies are found. Guidance and technical assistance should further promote the idea that testing is but one part of a larger assessment process.

5) **Federal guidance and technical assistance should also promote the development of State and local testing policy and practices that facilitate coordination in service delivery.**

V. <u>Next Steps</u>

This paper has offered recommendations as to the skills that should be encompassed under the terms "literacy" and "basic skills," possible directions in defining the level at which these skills may be considered "basic," and approaches to testing these skills. Immediate next steps which could be taken include:

1) **Public Comment:** Because of the many unanswered questions in the area of core basic skills assessment and instruction, we recommend that a version of this paper be published in the <u>Federal Register</u> to solicit widespread comment

---

[22]Programs with English as a second language components also need to assess speaking and listening skills.

from a variety of actors.

2) **Technical Work Groups:** We further propose that technical work groups, jointly supported by the three agencies, be established to examine priority issues in a more systematic fashion than has been possible here. Widespread public comment and development of information by technical work groups should precede development of Federal policy guidance and technical assistance to State and local actors in the various programs.

3) **Research:** Research agendas in the three departments could be coordinated to address some of the gaps identified in this paper and elsewhere. Areas for possible research coordination include: literacy requirements across occupations, transferability of skills gained in integrated assessment and instruction systems, comparative analysis of the usefulness, costs, and feasibility of criterion-referenced vs. norm-referenced grade level equivalent tests, the development of comparable scales for tests using a functional context, program design strategies to improve retention in literacy programs, and the implementation and impact of standards on literacy services.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.

GLOSSARY

TERMS FOR BASIC SKILLS AND LITERACY IN FOUR FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Terms in Legislation or Regulation*

- **Academic education** (AEA legislation): "the theoretical, the liberal, the speculative and classical subject matter found to compose the curriculum of the public secondary school."

- **Academic skills** (Perkins regulation): "reading, writing, mathematics, and science."

- **Academically disadvantaged** (Perkins regulation): "an individual who scores at or below the 25th percentile on a standardized achievement of aptitude test, whose secondary schools grades are below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale..., or who fails to attain minimal academic competencies...does not include individuals with learning disabilities."

- **Adult basic education** (AEA regulation): "instruction designed for an adult who -- (1) Has minimal competence in reading, writing, and computation; (2) Is not sufficiently competent to meet the educational requirements of adult life in the United States; or (3) Is not sufficiently competent to speak, read, or write the English language to allow employment commensurate with the adult's real ability.

  "If grade level measures are used, adult basic education includes grades 0 through 8.9."

- **Adult education** (AEA legislation): "services or instruction below the college level for adults -- (A) who are not

---

*Abbreviations:

AEA - Adult Education Act
JTPA - Job Training Partnership Act
JOBS - Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program in the Family Support Act
Perkins - Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act
Sawyer Literacy Bill - H.R. 3123, proposed to Subcommittee
Price Literacy Bill - H.R. 3122 proposed to Subcommittee
Simon Literacy Bill - S. 1310, full Committee version
Simon JTPA Amendments - S. 543, full Committee version

enrolled in secondary school; (B) who lack sufficient mastery of basic educational skills to enable them to function effectively in society or who do not have a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education and who have not achieved an equivalent level of education; (C) who are not currently required to be enrolled in school; and (D) whose lack of mastery of basic skills results in an inability to speak, read, or write the English language which constitutes a substantial impairment of their ability to get or retain employment commensurate with their real ability, and thus are in need of programs to help eliminate such inability and raise the level of education of such individuals with a view to making them less likely to become dependent on others.

- **Adult secondary education** (AEA regulation): "instruction designed for an adult who -- (1) Is literate and can function in everyday life, but is not proficient; or (2) Does not have a certificate of graduation (or its equivalent) from a school providing secondary education.

  "If using grade level measures, adult secondary education includes grade 9 through 12.9."

- **Basic education** (JOBS legislation): Part of a phrase "basic and remedial education to achieve a basic literacy level" that indicates one of several mandatory educational activities of JOBS.

- **Basic education skills** (JTPA regulation): One of three categories of youth employment competency. "Reading comprehension, math computation, writing, speaking, listening, problem solving, reasoning, and the capacity to use these skills in the workplace."

- **Basic skills**

  -- (Sawyer Literacy Bill): "reading, writing, speaking in the English language, mathematics, and problem solving."

  -- (Perkins Conference Report, 1984): mathematics, reading, writing, science and social studies. Although "basic skills" training and instruction are authorized activities under Title II of Perkins, they are not defined in regulation. The terms are used to mean both basic skills instruction for students enrolled in a vocational education program and basic occupational skill training.

- **Basic skills deficient** (Simon JTPA amendments): "English

reading or computing skills below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test or an equivalent score on a criterion referenced test."

- **Basic literacy level** (JOBS regulation): "a literacy level that allows a person to function at a level equivalent to at least grade 8.9."

- **Educationally disadvantaged adult** (AEA legislation): "an adult who -- (A) demonstrates basic skills equivalent to or below that of students at the fifth grade level; or (B) has been placed in the lowest or beginning level of an adult education program when that program does not use grade level equivalencies as a measure of student's basic skills.

- **English literacy program** (AEA legislation): "a program of instruction designed to help limited English proficient adults, out-of-school youths, or both, achieve full competence in the English language."

- **Job-specific skills** (JTPA regulation): One of three youth employment competency areas. "Primary job-specific skills encompass the proficiency to perform actual tasks and technical functions required by certain occupational fields at entry, intermediate or advanced levels. Secondary job-specific skills entail familiarity with and use of set-up procedures, safety measures, work-related terminology, recordkeeping and paperwork formats, tools, equipment and materials, and breakdown and clean-up routines."

- **Job skills training** (JOBS regulation): "includes vocational training for a participant in technical job skills and equivalent knowledge and abilities in a specific occupation area."

- **Job readiness** (JOBS regulation): activities "that help prepare participants for work by assuring that participants are familiar with general workplace expectations and exhibit work behavior and attitudes necessary to compete successfully in the labor market."

- **Limited English proficiency:**

  --(JTPA regulation): "the inability of an applicant whose native language is not English to communicate in English, resulting in a job handicap."

  --(JOBS regulation): "limited ability in speaking, reading or understanding the English language by a person whose native language is a language other than English or by a persons who lives in a family or community environment where a language other than English is the dominant language."

--(AEA and Perkins regulation): defines adults, individuals or persons of limited English proficiency to mean individuals who "(1) Were not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; (2) Come from environments where a language other than English is dominant; or (3) Are American Indian or Alaska Natives and who come from environments where a language other than English has had a significant impact on their level of English language proficiency; and (4) Who, by reason thereof, have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language to deny these individuals the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in our society."

- **Literacy:**

  --(Sawyer Literacy Bill): "The attainment of a level of proficiency in basic skills that is sufficient to allow each individual to meet goals for proficiency and to meet social and economic demands for proficiency".

  --(Simon Literacy Bill): "The knowledge and skills necessary to communicate including the reading, writing, basic skills, computation, speaking and listening skills normally associated with the ability to function at a level greater than the 8th grade so that education, employment, citizenry and family life is enhanced."

- **Literate functioning** (AEA legislation): Used to describe one of the outcomes for programs authorized by the legislation, but not defined.

- **Long-term self sufficiency** (Simon JTPA amendments): is defined as increased educational and occupational skills, increased employment and earnings, and reduction in welfare dependency.

- **Pre-employment skills** (JTPA regulation): defined as one of three categories of youth employment competencies. It includes those skills needed to look for, obtain and retain a job other than basic education skills and job specific skills. These include: "world of work awareness, labor market knowledge, occupational information, values clarification and personal understanding, career planning and decision making, and job search techniques (resumes, interviews, application, and follow-up letters). They also encompass survival/daily living skills such as using the phone, telling time, shopping, renting an apartment, opening a bank account, and using public transportation."

- **Work maturity** (JTPA regulation): defined as one of three categories of youth employment competency. "Includes positive work habits, attitudes and behavior such as punctuality, regular attendance, presenting a neat appearance, getting along and working well with others...Also entails developing motivation and adaptability, obtain effective coping and problem-solving skills and acquiring an improved self-image."

- **Workplace literacy** (Sawyer Literacy Bill): "Refers to the basic skills (reading, writing, computation, problem-solving and communication) needed by workers in a Service Delivery Area to gain access to the labor market, remain employed on a long-term basis, obtain advancement within business and industry and take advantage of job-specific training."

Terms Used in the Literature

- **Adult special education** (Adult Learning Activities Terminology, NCES, 1982): "Instructional activities designed for learners identified as: physically handicapped, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, culturally disadvantaged, and mentally gifted and talented."

- **Basic skills** (Adult Learning Activities Terminology, NCES, 1982): the acquisition of basic skills involving integrating the core cognitive skills of literacy and numeracy with social and problem solving skills to meet changing demands.

  --(JTPA Lexicon, May 1984): locally defined levels of reading (comprehension), language arts (writing and verbal communication) and occupational skills which enable an individual to function in the labor market and in society.

- **Basic workplace skills** (Workplace Basics, developed by American Society for Training and Development under a DOL grant) fall into seven areas that employers, when surveyed, said were important: learning to learn; reading, writing and computation; listening and oral communication; creative thinking/problem solving; self-esteem/goal setting; motivation/personal and career development; interpersonal/ negotiation/teamwork; and organizational effectiveness/ leadership

- **Employability skills** (The Unfinished Agenda, 1985, regarding vocational education): "self-esteem, positive attitudes toward work, safe work habits, job seeking skills."

- **Functional literacy** (in the National Adult Performance Level study, 1970, University of Texas-Austin) is defined as the ability of an adult to apply skills to several major knowledge areas which are important to adult success:

communication, computation, problem-solving, and interpersonal relationships.

- **Long term employability** (Adult Learning Activities Terminology, NCES, 1982) is defined as employability skills: skills, knowledge, techniques, aptitudes, and abilities of an individual that are useful or necessary to obtain and hold a job.

CATEGORIES OF TERMS

RELATING TO BASIC SKILLS AND LITERACY

Terms that Identify or Suggest Types of Skills

Basic skills
Basic academic skills
Basic education skills
Basic workplace skills
Functional literacy
Literacy
Employability skills or basic employability skills
Job readiness skills
Pre-employment/work maturity skills
Workplace basics

Terms that Identify Characteristics of Individuals

Academically disadvantaged
Basic literacy level
Basic skills deficient
Educable
Educationally disadvantaged adult
Learning disabled
Limited English proficient

Terms that Identify Authorized Types of Services

Academic education
Adult basic education
Adult education
Adult secondary education
Basic and remedial education
Basic education
Basic literacy instruction
Remediation
Basic skills instruction
Pre-vocational educational preparation

Terms that Identify Goals or Desired Outcomes

Functional literacy
Literacy
Literate functioning
Long-term employability
Long-term self-sufficiency

APPENDIX B.

OVERVIEW: Basic Skills in Four Federal Programs

Described below are legislative and regulatory provisions on basic skills and literacy in the four programs under consideration here. Also discussed are common program practices at the State and local levels which relate to the delivery of literacy instruction. Such practices vary widely both between and within States.

o **Adult Education Act (AEA)**

The Adult Education Act authorizes formula grants to States to operate local programs that provide three types of educational services for adults: adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (preparation for adult high school diplomas or equivalency programs), and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs. In FY 1987-88, service was equally divided between these three types of programs, with about one million enrolled in each.

While the 1988 amendments added a new emphasis on the role of basic education in enabling adults to "benefit from job training and retraining programs and obtain and retain productive employment", AEA's purpose also is to improve educational opportunities for adults who lack literacy skills requisite to "effective citizenship", to enable adults to acquire the educational skills necessary for "literate functioning", and to "enable adults who so desire to continue their education to at least the level of completion of secondary school."

In addition to the State grant program, AEA also authorizes demonstration projects for workplace literacy, English literacy, adult education for migrant farmworkers and immigrants, and literacy volunteer training. AEA also requires the Secretary of Education to make a determination of the criteria for defining literacy within 2 years of AEA enactment (April 1990) and to "identify concretely those skills that comprise the basic educational skills needed for literate functioning." Once a definition of literacy has been made, the Secretary, in consultation with the Congress, must "determine an accurate estimate of the number of illiterate adults" in the nation. This requirement is to be met through a project--the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS)--being conducted by Educational Testing Service. NALS will run from 1990 to 1993 and provide a definitional framework and comprehensive data on the nature and extent of adult illiteracy.

State grant allocations are based on each State's proportionate share of adult citizens who have not completed high

school. States devise their own formulas for distributing funds to the substate level, but must use at least 10 percent of Federal funds for education programs for criminal offenders and other institutionalized individuals. There is a 20 percent cap on use of Federal funds for adult secondary education.

Funds are channeled to a variety of institutions at the local level, such as local education agencies, community colleges, community-based organizations, libraries, correctional institutions, and other public agencies.

In FY 1989, the appropriation for State formula grants was $136 million. States and localities have typically provide an additional $300 million to support adult education activities.

Program Levels: AEA regulations define "adult basic education," as instruction at grade levels 0 through 8.9, if grade level measures are used. "Adult secondary education" includes grade levels 9 through 12.9 if grade level measures are used.

The Act also defines an "educationally disadvantaged adult" as an adult who demonstrates basic skills at or below the 5th grade or is placed in the beginning level of programs that do not use grade level measures. One of the evaluation factors for local programs is the extent to which such adults are served.

Testing Requirements: The 1988 amendments to AEA specifically required the use of results on standardized tests (either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced) for program evaluation purposes. Regulation is permissive as to types of tests that can be used, but does require State Education Agencies to determine which tests are appropriate for measuring program effectiveness within the framework set forth for reviews and evaluation. Regulation does not require that there be standardized test data on every participant or for every local program.

Many AEA programs in the past have used curriculum-based tests, which are not standardized. However, even when standardized tests are used in AEA programs, they can vary widely within a single State. A review by one State of test instruments used found that 24 different tests were being used at entry in 67 local programs. (Georgia paper) The most frequently used standardized tests is AEA program are norm-referenced, grade-level equivalent tests; among these, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) appears to be the most common.

Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS)

The JOBS program, one of the centerpieces of the welfare reform legislation passed in 1988, is established under Title II of the Family Support Act. It provides funding and creates a set of requirements upon welfare agencies to assist applicants and recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to obtain the employment, education, training and related supportive services that will help them avoid long-term welfare dependence.

JOBS is intended to shift the focus of the AFDC system toward transition to economic self-sufficiency and away from merely providing income maintenance. The program replaces the WIN and WIN demonstration programs as well as the work programs available under title IV-A of the Social Security Act. Under JOBS, States are required to establish program components for education and other mandatory activities, to offer at least two of four optional program activities (job search, on-the-job training, work supplementation, or community work experience), as well as to provide child care and other supportive services necessary to participate in JOBS. All JOBS participants must receive an assessment and undergo employability plan development prior to placement in most activities.

To receive enhanced Federal matching funds, State must meet standards on the percentage of the non-exempt caseload participating in the program and target services to certain AFDC recipients, such as long-term recipients, young parents who are also school dropouts or who have little or no work experience in the preceding year, and members of families who are within two year of losing eligibility for AFDC because of the age of the youngest child.

JOBS will be administered by the State agencies that administer AFDC (known as IV-A agencies, after the relevant title in the Social Security Act). Some States have State-supervised, county-administered welfare programs, which means that, with the exception of matters subject to overall State policy, individual counties develop and administer the programs. Welfare clients are served through county or local agency offices.

Many aspects of the programs may be conducted under arrangements or contracts with other public agencies or private organizations. JOBS strongly emphasizes coordination with other agencies and programs that serve similar or overlapping client populations--JTPA, the State education agency, the State employment security agency, as well as local public and private organizations and institutions. Certain JOBS activities relating to overall program administration and actions on or affecting individual AFDC benefits may not be delegated or contracted, however.

JOBS places a strong emphasis on education. States must require non-exempt participants under age 20 who have not finished high school or its equivalent to participate in high school education or equivalency programs. Excusing participants under age 18 from such activities is possible only under rare circumstances and then only for placement into other educational activities or in training that is combined with education. There are exceptions for 18 and 19 year-olds, such as a determination that available educational activities are inappropriate.

Deficiency Level: JOBS regulations currently define a "basic literacy level" as one that allows an individual to function at a level equivalent to at least grade 8.9, thus permitting States to define a higher level. However, the basic literacy level applies only to participants 20 years of age and over who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. Educational activities must be provided to these participants, unless they demonstrate a basic literacy level or if their employment goal does not require a high school diploma or equivalent. The primary program goal for those under age 20 is achievement of a high school diploma or equivalent credential.

Testing Requirements: JOBS requires an initial assessment of each participant's employability, based on educational, child care, and supportive services needs as well as on a participant's proficiencies, skills deficiencies and prior work experience.

However, regulations are permissive as to how State IV-A agencies must conduct this assessment and do not require that literacy, reading or any other skills be tested either for those possessing a high school or equivalent credential or for those who do not. (Indeed, the conference report on the legislation eliminated any requirements for testing literacy or reading skills.) Regulations do not prescribe the method of assessing an individual's achievement level, and therefore do not preclude the use of equivalent scores on a criterion-referenced test.

There are no requirements for evaluating learning gains in educational activities, only that good or satisfactory progress be maintained for certain purposes of the program. Satisfactory progress in educational activities, whether remedial, high school, GED-prep, post-secondary or other educational activities is determined by qualitative and quantitative standards developed by the educational institution and approved by the State agency in charge of JOBS and the State or local educational agency. Measures such as grade point averages or test scores could be used, for example.

Data collection for case records require that the highest grade completed and the date completed be noted. Literacy level need be included only when the State elects to determine a literacy level.

Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)

Although the Job Training Partnership Act authorizes several different programs (including services for dislocated workers and the Job Corps), the primary concern here is with employment and training services for disadvantaged youth and adults authorized under Title II of the Act. (It should be noted, however, that many dislocated workers have low levels of basic skills and that basic skills training is an allowable activity for programs serving these workers.)

JTPA Title II-A provides funds to States and through them, to local Service Delivery Areas (SDAs), for year-round employment and training services for economically disadvantaged youth and adults. However, 8 percent of Title II-A funds at the State level are set-aside for educational activities, with these funds usually allocated to State education agencies, as opposed to the those responsible for administering regular JTPA programs.

JTPA Title II-B authorizes a summer youth employment program and now requires assessment of participants' reading and math skill levels and the provision of basic and remedial education. Title II-B programs, however, primarily provide employment opportunities in public and private non-profit organizations, with wages paid out of program funds.

Most training services are not provided directly by JTPA staff, but rather are purchased under contract with service providers, such as private for-profit and non-profit organizations, or public institutions, such as community colleges or technical schools. Often intake and assessment are also contracted out, either as separate activities, or part of a whole package of services.

In JTPA, programs are held accountable for meeting certain outcome standards. In the past such standards included, for adults, entered employment rates, average wage at placement, and average cost per entered employment. For youth, job placement is currently one of several outcomes that are recognized. Others include returning dropouts to school, enrollment in further training or enlistment in the military, or meeting two out of three 3 PIC-determined "youth employment competencies". These competencies fall into three areas: "pre-employment/work maturity", basic education skills, and job-specific skills. Currently, there are no competency attainments for adults that can be used for obtaining program credit.

Performance rates which local programs must meet are based on a national regression model; numerical standards for local programs can be adjusted based on characteristics of participants and local economic conditions. "Basic skills deficient" could serve as additional adjustment factor, with local standards for

employment and competency outcomes adjusted by a factor based on the number of clients who fell into this category. Basic skill attainment currently serves as part of a valued performance outcome for youth.

Standards written into contracts with local service providers are often not adjusted in practice, however.

Deficiency Level: JTPA requires that data be collected on whether each enrollee reads below the 7th grade level, but allows the "minimal level of need" for "basic educational skills"--as one of three youth employment competency areas--to be defined by the local Private Industry Council.

Testing Requirements: Current JTPA regulation does not specify what kinds of tests or assessment procedures must be utilized, except for PIC-determined youth employment competencies. Regulations on these competencies require that "all assessment techniques must be objective, unbiased and conform to widely accepted measurement criteria. Measurement methods must contain clearly defined criteria, be field tested for utility, consistency and accuracy and provide for the training/preparation of all raters/scorers."

Regulation on data reporting requires that the all II-A clients be assessed (though not necessarily tested) as to whether their reading level falls below the 7th grade. Data must also be reported on the highest level of education completed and dropout status. The 1986 amendments also required that all summer youth participants be assessed as to their reading and math levels, though there are no requirements regarding testing, test selection, or what agencies or institutions are to administer tests. Local educational agencies' scores may be used in lieu of the SDA assessing participants.

Basic Skills Provisions in Proposed Amendments: At the time of this writing, only the full Committee in the Senate has passed amendments to JTPA. Thus, only the Senate amendments, known as the Simon bill, are discussed here.

The Simon bill, which includes many of the provisions in DOL's own proposal, makes increased educational and occupational skills a goal of the program, in addition to the current goals in JTPA of increasing employment and earnings and reducing welfare dependency. The amendments would also require that performance standards include indicators of long-term self-sufficiency as measured by increased educational and occupational skills. The bill would also define "basic skills deficient" as reading and computing at the 8th grade level or equivalent measure on a criterion-referenced test, and would require that 70 percent of adults and 100 percent of youth have this or other characteristics of the hard-to-serve.

These provisions have a number of implications for testing and measurement of basic skills, however. Standardized tests for determining if individuals fit into the target category of "basic skills deficient" would have to be used if programs were to determine whether participants' reading and computing were at the 8th grade level or an equivalent measure on a criterion-referenced test.

The amendments would also require that measures of increased educational (and occupational) skills be part of the performance standards system, which implies that local programs would receive "credit" for increasing such skills. Because the current performance standards system is based on a statistical model that ideally permits valid comparisons between SDAs and provides a mechanism for adjustments to local standards on the basis of client characteristics and economic conditions, minimum requirements for measuring and documenting skill increases would have to be uniform and consistent nationally. Similarly, criteria for determining whether local programs can receive "credit" would have to be consistent nationally.

The amendments would also require that youth dropouts served in JTPA either return to school, enroll in an alternative school, or enroll in an education program approved by some local education entity. Both adults and youth in JTPA would have to be assessed on their basic skills and other criteria, and a service strategy be developed for each participant. Remediation of basic skills would have to be provided if called for in the service strategy. The bill contains no testing or test requirements regarding the initial assessment.

Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (Perkins)

The Federal involvement in vocational education, under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, is arrayed around two broad themes. One is to make vocational education programs accessible to all persons, and the other is to improve the quality of vocational education programs in order to give the Nation's workforce the marketable skills needed to improve productivity and promote economic growth.

Title II of the Perkins Act reflects these dual purposes by earmarking 57 percent of the basic State grant for services to special populations and 43 percent for program improvement. (Federal funds are overmatched by combined State and local funds in an approximate 1:10 ratio.) Included among the special populations are the handicapped; the disadvantaged; adults in need of training and retraining; single parents, homemakers, and single pregnant women; participants in programs designed to eliminate sex bias and stereotyping; and the incarcerated. Each of these populations has its own set-aside reserve, e.g., 22 percent of Title II is reserved for the disadvantaged.

The Perkins Act stipulates that there must be a State Board of Vocational Education, which shall be the sole State agency responsible for the administration or supervision of the State's vocational education programs. This State Board receives Federal funds and submits the State plan. In turn, the State board carries out projects, services and activities either directly, through a school operated by the State Board, through awards to State agencies or schools, or, primarily, through awards to eligible recipients. These eligible recipients, which are local educational agencies or postsecondary educational institutions, include comprehensive and vocational high schools, area vocational-technical schools, and community and junior colleges.

In the past, some of the funds earmarked for the disadvantaged have been used for remediation in basic skills and literacy. Perkins regulation permits such instruction for vocational education students, if the State Board determines that is necessary. Regulations also specify that "basic literacy instruction" is an allowable activity for programs under the State set-aside for single parents, homemakers, or single pregnant women. "Prevocational educational preparation and basic skills development" are allowable in the separately funded program for community-based organizations providing vocational education. Similarly, the application of academic skills of reading, writing, math and science is an allowable activity under the separate Consumer and Homemaking program. Program improvement funds under Title II-B can also be used for curriculum development involving the application of basic skills training.

Deficiency Level: The Perkins Act has no term defining deficiency in basic skills, although it does define the "disadvantaged," for whom equal access to vocational education must be provided and a certain percentage of Federal funds must be used to provide services. Disadvantage can either be economic or academic; the "academically disadvantaged," according to Perkins regulation, are individuals who score at or below the 25th percentile on a standardized achievement or aptitude test, whose secondary school grades are below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, or who fail to attain minimal academic competencies. This allows for local school discretion in determining such minimal competencies.

Testing Requirements: The current Perkins Act does not require that any particular type of test or assessment be used in measuring basic skills. However, the use of competency-based curricula and performance-based tests for occupational skills is widespread in practice.

Basic Skills Provisions in Proposed Amendments: The current Perkins Act is due to be reauthorized this year, and there are likely to be substantial changes. At the time of this writing, bills reauthorizing the Perkins Act have passed the House floor and the Senate full Committee.

Both bills attempt to channel more funds at the secondary level to local school districts where there are concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. While the bills differ as to the authorized services, both emphasize the upgrading of vocational programs through the integration of vocational and academic skills (which could be at a basic or advanced level) and both include provisions requiring States to set up systems for evaluating local programs in terms of objective student attainments; skill competencies would be one of a number of criteria. The Senate Committee bill specifies that basic skill attainments are one of the criteria that must be used.

FOUR FEDERAL PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

	JOBS	JTPA II-A	Adult Education Act (State Grant Only)	Perkins Title II
Purpose/Goals	Assure needy families get ed., training, & employment to avoid long term dependency.	Prepare youth & unskilled adults for labor force entry, offer training to those with multiple barriers to emp.	Acquire basic skills for literate functioning; basic ed. to benefit from job training; complete h.s. or equivalent	Promote equal access to vocational education; improve quality of vocational programs.
Eligibility/ Targeting	AFDC applicants and recipients; targeted to current and potential long term recipients.	Econ. disadvan. incl welfare and food stamp recips.; 10% can be non-disadv. w/ barriers to empl.	No eligibility reqs. Target groups: educationally disadvantaged, dropouts, LEP.	57% of funds earmarked for 6 special populations incl. disadvantaged (eco. or acad.)
Allowable or Required Services and Activities	Mandatory education and other components plus 2 optional components; child care guaranteed.	Skills trng, remedial ed., OJT, job search assistance, job development; some supportive svcs	Adult basic education; English-as-a second language; GED preparation and secondary education.	57% for prgroams, svcs & activities; 43% for program improvement, innovation & expansion.
Governance/ Delivery System	State IV-A agencies and local and county counterparts; direct svcs. & contracting	Governor & State Council; PICs and SDA entity at local level; contracting.	State Board of Ed.; grants to local providers: LEAS, comm. coll., CBOS	State Board of Voc. Ed.; grants to eligible recipients: LEAs and post-sec.
Program Eval. & Performance Mgt. Measures	Participation rates based on combined and averaged hours.	Performance stds. on placement and wages; for youth, can use 2 out of 3 employment competencies.	State developed criteria for eval. programs; standardized test data req. on some participants	State developed measures: relevance of courses, proposed skill levels, competencies
Set-asides/ Matching reqs./ Cost Limits	Complex matching rates; reduced Federal share if participation rates not met.	15% caps on admin. & on supportive svcs at local level; 8% education set-aside at State level.	10% must be used for institutionalized; 20% limit on adult secondary education (GED prep).	Excess cost matching required for disadvantaged; 22% of funds for disadvantaged.
Federal FY 1989 Appropriation	$39 million (4th Qtr) $92 million (WIN)	$1.7 billion	$136 million	$826 million
State and Local Funding FY 1989	Estimate not available.	None.	$300 million (est.)	$10-12 billion (est.)

APPENDIX D.

REFERENCES

Alamprese, J. A., Adult Literacy Research and Development: An Agenda for Action, (Background Paper for Project on Adult Literacy), Washington, D.C.: Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, December 1988.

Anderson, A. F., A Report on Formal and Informal Instruments Used to Assess Students Performance in Georgia Adult Literacy Programs, Atlanta, Ge.: Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Literacy Programs, Office of Adult Literacy Programs, January 1989.

Bailis, L. N. and Butler, E. P., Testing and Assessment in Publicly-Supported Job Training for the Disadvantaged, (Prepared for The National Commission on Testing and Public Policy), Center for Human Resources, Brandeis University, July 1989.

Berryman S. E., "The Economy, Literacy Requirements, and At-Risk Adults" in Literacy and The Marketplace: Improving the Literacy of Low-Income Single Mothers, (Papers from a Conference supported by the Rockefeller Foundation), New York: Rockefeller Foundation, June 1989.

Carnevale, A. P., Gainer, L. J. and Meltzer, A. S., Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want, (Publication produced under contract for the U.S. Department of Labor), Alexandria, Va.: American Society for Training and Development, 1989.

A Description of the U.S. Experience in Providing Vocational Skills to Individuals with Low Literacy Skills, (Draft Paper), Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Learning Systems, U.S. Department of Labor, April 1, 1986.

An Introduction to Basic Skills Education for At-Risk Youth: A Decision Maker's Guide to Principles and Practices, (Paper prepared under a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor), Waltham, Mass.: Center for Human Resources, Heller School, Brandeis University, December 1989.

Kirsch, I. S. and Jungblut, A., Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults, (Report for the National Assessment of Education Progress, under contract from the U. S. Department of Education), Princeton, N.J.: Education and Testing Service, 1986.

Mikulecky, L., Ehlinger, J. and Meenan, A. L., Training for Job Literacy Demands: What Research Applies to Practice,

Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy,.

Morris, R., Strumpf, L. and Curnan, S. and Rothstein, F. R., Editor, Using Basic Skills Testing to Improve the Effectiveness of Remediation in Employment and Training Programs for Youth, Washington, D.C.: National Commission for Employment Policy, May 1988.

Testing and Assessment in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language Programs, (Draft Report), Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1989.